

# Check out the May 2021 Newsletter!

See the online version at [vvschool.ca/news-events/newsletter](https://vvschool.ca/news-events/newsletter).



**Learning Without Limits**

**Happy month of May!** We're one month closer to the end of the school year, and, well, things are as wild as ever! The latest round of COVID-19 restrictions in Alberta may have had less impact on the Vista Virtual School community than on the rest of the province, but none of us live in a bubble, and it impacts us all. Read further for information on how the latest provincial measures affect life at VVS.

COVID or not, our grade 12 students are on the cusp of graduation, and nothing will take this away from our wonderful grads! Our online graduation ceremony will be held on Friday, June 4, 2021. Invitations are now out, and you are requested to RSVP no later than Monday, May 24 if you wish to attend. The [graduation section](#) of the VVS website has some fresh updates about the event, and more is forthcoming, so stay tuned.

April showers bring May flowers, which of course bring us to fall registration, which will be opening up to everybody after the May long weekend. In addition, we are still accepting summer school applications. Read on for key dates.

We always welcome your comments and feedback regarding this newsletter, or anything else. If you have any questions or concerns, please phone us toll-free at 1-855-974-5333 or talk with your teacher. If you have any VVS-related stories you'd like to share, here or on our website or social media platforms, please contact [Ben Freeland](#), our communications and marketing specialist.

Have a wonderful month of May!

Sincerely,



Mike Loitz,  
Principal



Treena Bradbury,  
Associate Principal



Frank McCallum,  
Associate Principal

## New This Month

### Fall Registration

Vista Virtual School will be opening up registrations for the 2021-2022 school year on Tuesday, May 25 at 10:00 a.m.

Normally VVS opens registrations for the following year at the start of May, at which time we are required to obtain new registration forms for the new school year. We have heard over the past few years that redoing the online registration form, while not difficult, is time consuming, and a hassle for those whose contact information is unchanged.



To that end, we are improving the registration process so that current students who are 18-years-old (or their guardians if the student is not yet 18-years-old) can submit an automatic registration form and simply confirm information instead of entering all of the same information over again. This feature will be available on the left hand side of the parent portal, for which login information was recently provided.

As this is a new feature, we are still in the testing process to ensure all information flows as we need it to flow. Consequently, we will be delaying registrations for the 2021-22 school year until after the May long weekend. We hope this short delay will ease the registration process and better address parent and student needs.

If you have any other questions or concerns, please contact us at [vv.main@pembinahills.ca](mailto:vv.main@pembinahills.ca).

### Second Semester Dates at a Glance

June 15 – All second semester assignments/quizzes due (all grades)

June 22 – All second semester exams completed (all grades)

### Summer Semester Dates at a Glance

June 15 – Deadline to register for 5-credit summer semester courses

July 2 – Deadline to withdraw from 5-credit summer semester courses

July 10 – Deadline to register for or withdraw from 1 or 3-credit summer semester courses

July 15 – Marks for summer semester courses start being reported, as courses are completed

August 6 – All summer semester course work completed

### New K-6 Curriculum

Pembina Hills School Division has come to the decision to not participate in piloting any part of the Alberta government's draft kindergarten to grade 6 curriculum. Reasons behind the decision include the potential impact of such a pilot project on education plan priorities, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student achievement, concerns about teacher well-being, logistical issues around piloting, and specific issues with the curriculum content itself.

A detailed explanation of the rationale behind the decision, including the specific issues the division has with the curriculum, is available on the [division website](#).

The government of Alberta is continuing to seek feedback on the province's draft kindergarten to grade 6 curriculum. We encourage everyone to complete the government's [online survey](#) on the K-6 curriculum, which will remain open until the spring of 2022. You can further make your voice heard by writing a letter to your MLA, the education minister, and/or the premier expressing your concerns about the draft curriculum and other issues facing our educational system amid the pandemic.

### **Graduation Ceremony**

If you are among our soon-to-be 2021 grads, you should already have received a formal invitation email to our upcoming virtual graduation ceremony, which is being held via Zoom on Friday, June 4, 2021 starting at 6:30 pm. If you wish to participate in our upcoming virtual graduation ceremony and have not already done so, please RSVP to Ms. Seward at [Aletta.Seward@pembinahills.ca](mailto:Aletta.Seward@pembinahills.ca) no later than Monday, May 24, 2021.



For more information on graduation, including the official schedule of events, submitting a personal write-up, and arranging grad photo shoots, please visit the [Grad 2021 page](#) on the VVS website.

### **Paid Internship Opportunities with CAREERS: The Next Generation**

What are your summer plans? Have you thought about a paid internship in a skilled trade? CAREERS: The Next Generation is currently seeking applications from high school students interested in trades careers for its 2021 summer internships. CAREERS internships are a great way to “test drive” a potential career in a wide range of industries while getting paid AND earning credits. You can find out more about this opportunity and apply for an internship [here](#).



For those interested in a taste of what CAREERS TNG has to offer, there are several free virtual career showcases coming up. On Wednesday, May 12 there will be a [sheet metal worker virtual showcase](#) and on Tuesday, May 18 CAREERS will be holding the latest of its [Young Women In Trades & Technology \(YWITT\) mentorship events](#).

## WISEST Science Odyssey Week



The University of Alberta's WISEST (Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science, and Technology) group is holding its annual [Science Odyssey Week](#), which, despite the name, is actually two weeks long—from May 1 to 16. This two-week showcase will feature presentations from five women at different stages of their STEM careers, each with their own unique perspective on life as a woman in science, technology, and engineering.

The conference is free for all participants. Student registrants will be entered into a contest to win a STEM-themed prize pack.

### New COVID Restrictions

Due to the most recent provincial COVID lockdown, the Provincial Achievement Tests that were to be hosted in early May have been cancelled. VVS will continue to offer exam appointments to students with special needs or accommodations only. Online exams are still being proctored and should be the default unless there is a special need that cannot be met online.

All VVS support staff will continue to be working from home until further notice. The Calgary campus will remain open for exams and other business, but strictly by appointment. Those wishing to visit are required to book an appointment in advance, follow all Alberta Health Services guidelines, and to wear a mask. Book returns will continue by appointment and with appropriate masking and physical distancing.

Our phone line (1-855-974-5333 x5317) is being monitored but not answered in person, due to our support staff working from home. All voicemails are being redirected to the VV Support email inbox and are being responded to in the order in which they are received. Our support staff may respond to messages either by phone or email. All other phone numbers and extensions will remain the same unless otherwise noted.

### Accessing the Student Information System (SIS)

Parents and guardians who have not yet logged into the VVS Student Information System (SIS) should do so as soon as possible, as this is the best way to monitor your child's progress, review correspondence, keep track of course timelines, and stay up to date with your child's activities and submissions. You should have received an email providing you with login information for your account.

A screenshot of the Vista Virtual School website. The header includes the VVS logo, the text 'Vista Virtual School Learning Without Limits', and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and a search icon. There are two main buttons: 'Register Here' and 'Student/Guardian Login'. Below the header is a navigation menu with links for 'Our School', 'News &amp; Events', 'Grades 1 - 12', 'Adult Upgrading', 'International Students', and 'Current Students'. A red arrow points to the 'Student/Guardian Login' button. Below the navigation menu are two informational banners: an orange one titled 'Vista Virtual School remains open, but by appointment only.' and a green one titled 'Temporary shift to at-home-learning'.

To get started, visit the [school website](#) and click on the Student/Guardian Login button in the top right hand corner to be directed to the SIS login page. If you have forgotten your username and/or

password, you can retrieve them by submitting your email address. You can also contact us at [wvsupport@pembinahills.ca](mailto:wvsupport@pembinahills.ca) or by phone at 1-855-974-5333 x5317 if you have any trouble.

### **Adult Learning at Vista Virtual School**

Vista Virtual School welcomes applications from adult upgrading students—defined as those aged 20 or up as of September 1, 2020—throughout the year; adult students can start courses at any time. For more information on our adult program, please visit [our website](#) or email us at [wvsadults@pembinahills.ca](mailto:wvsadults@pembinahills.ca).

### **School Council and Parent Input**

Although we do not have a formal School Council, we welcome parents, guardians, and students to provide input on the operations of the school. Your suggestions can be directed to [Mike Loitz](#), Principal.

### **Engage With Us on Social Media**

In addition to this newsletter and our regular website news postings, Vista Virtual School is also active on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). We encourage you to follow us for updates on everything from post-secondary orientations to work experience opportunities to news articles and online resources of interest to students and parents, as well as to just say hello and engage with us.



Also, should you come across any interesting virtual learning resources you think we should share via our social media networks, we would love to hear from you. We too are always learning, and we would love to share what you find out there.

## Monthly Events Calendar

Check out our [monthly events](#) on our website. We update this calendar as events are added.

## Important Dates in May

May 2 – [Orthodox Easter](#)

May 9 – [Mother's Day](#)

May 13 – [Eid ul Fitr \(End of Ramadan\)](#)

May 15 – [International Day of Families](#)

May 17 – [World Telecommunication and Information Society Day](#)

May 21 – [World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development](#)

May 22 – [International Day for Biological Diversity](#)

May 24 – [Victoria Day \(Statutory Holiday\)](#)

May 26 – [Vesak](#)

May 31 – [World No Tobacco Day](#)

# Mental Health Week: Naming Your Emotions

Every year since 1951, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) has hosted Mental Health Week in the first full week in May, making this year the 70th such observance. This year's Mental Health Week is being observed from May 3 to 9, during which time the CMHA encourages Canadians to rally on behalf of mental health awareness—in schools, in the workplace, at home, and everywhere else.



It's no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a severe toll on people's mental health the world over. A [recent US survey](#) showed that a staggering four in ten Americans were suffering from anxiety or depression amid the pandemic, up from one in ten a year prior, while [a study here in Canada](#) showed that 40% of Canadians have experienced a decline in their mental health during the pandemic. Social isolation appears to be the main driving factor behind this negative trend, along with health anxieties and worries about personal finances and job security.

Each year, the CMHA chooses a different theme for Mental Health Week, and this week's is emotional literacy. We've all heard the saying "If you can name it, you can tame it," and this holds especially true for our emotional landscape. We all experience strong emotions, but much of the time we are not aware of precisely what those emotions are. Fear can often masquerade as anger, which in turn can be a cover for sadness. Naming, recognizing, and accepting our emotions for what they are is the first step in healing from negative states of being. You can't fix what you don't understand.

Of course, this is easier said than done. Human nature is such that when we feel a negative emotion, we naturally recoil from it and want to distract ourselves. Some distractions are more benign than others, but all of them cause us to hide from our negative feelings, which in turn blocks us from positive change. Conversely, science shows that when we put our feelings and thoughts about upsetting experiences into words, we experience an overall improvement in wellbeing.

Here are some tips on how to tame your emotional landscape:

1. **Accept the discomfort.** While humans tend to label certain emotions as "good" and others as "bad", all emotions have their place and none are intrinsically good or bad. Our overall sense of wellbeing is reliant on a complex interplay of positive and negative emotions, and expressing unpleasant feelings is in fact necessary for creating intimacy in relationships, developing trust, and of course personal healing.
2. **Give it a name.** Don't know quite what that emotion is yet? Call it George! Psychologists refer to this act as "affect labelling", and this simple act has been shown to reduce activity in the amygdala—the region of the human brain responsible for fear—and to stimulate the prefrontal areas associated with improved emotional processing and behavioural regulation.
3. **Put it in writing.** Do you keep a journal? Many people find writing in a journal enormously healing, and there's a good reason why. In addition to the positive effects of naming your

emotions, the act of writing can also reduce cortisol levels in the body, leading to decreased stress levels.

4. **Meditate.** Mindfulness meditation, once strictly the purview of “eastern” religions like Buddhism, is now becoming increasingly popular in the western world, and for good reason—we’re all being eaten alive by stress. The practice of meditation is entirely predicated on identifying thoughts *as* thoughts rather than banishing thoughts altogether. A multitude of meditation apps now exist, but all you really need is a timer, a comfortable chair or cushion, and ten minutes of uninterrupted time to focus on the breath and your emotional landscape.
5. **Take a cold shower.** No joke. Cold showers have been shown to have a [wide range of mental and physical health benefits](#), ranging from improved circulation and illness resistance to decreased depression, which it does by increasing endorphins (i.e., “happiness hormones”). Moreover, spending two minutes or so under a cold showerhead is also a great way to practice getting “comfortable” with discomfort, which in turn can help you confront other types of negative feelings.
6. **Seek out the help you need.** While all these techniques are valuable tools in improving your mental health, none can be considered substitutes for clinical mental health care. The [CMHA](#) has support services available across Canada and online. Support is also available via the government of Canada’s [Wellness Together site](#) and Alberta Health Services’ [Help In Tough Times page](#). Vista Virtual School’s teachers, academic counsellors, and support staff are also available to help in times of need.

Got any ideas of your own on how to name and tame your emotions? You can join the conversation on social media with the hashtag #GetReal.

## Contacts

<b>Principal</b>	Mike Loitz		
<b>Associate Principals</b>	Treena Bradbury	Frank McCallum	
<b>Academic Counsellors</b>	<a href="#">Dominick Gallo</a>	Andrea Robin	Christy Filgate (Special Ed.)
<b>Adult Academic Counsellors</b>	<a href="mailto:vsadults@pembinahills.ca">vsadults@pembinahills.ca</a>		
<b>School Hours</b>	8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. (teachers’ working hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.)		
<b>Contact Information</b>	P: 1-855-974-5333	VVS Support x5317	
<b>School Email</b>	<a href="mailto:vsupport@pembinahills.ca">vsupport@pembinahills.ca</a>		
<b>We're Online</b>	<b>Twitter</b> @VistaVirtualSch	<b>Facebook</b> VistaVirtualSch	<b>Website</b> vvschool.ca
<b>Connect with Us</b>	Please follow us on <a href="#">Facebook</a> and <a href="#">Twitter</a> for updates on events and activities throughout the year. Our <a href="#">website</a> is also a valuable source of information.	Do you have a story to tell (or a typo to report)? Email <a href="#">Ben Freeland</a> .	The newsletter is published monthly and sent to students, parents, and guardians by email.